

General Delivery
Fort Albany, Ontario
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OPEN LETTER to
Mrs. Margaret Mottershead
Deputy Minister
Ontario Ministry of Health

28 April 1994

Dear Mrs. Mottershead,

Are the people of Ontario are being well served? The public servant responsible for policy and research recommendations intended to benefit persons disabled by environmental sensitivities claims to know nothing about our primary concern - physical and emotional abuse by care givers.

She is resolved not to know of abuses.

This is the primary issue yet, after years of involvement, we are expected to continue a masquerade where neither the Ministry of Health Health Strategies Advisor nor the Legislative Research Branch, nor the Minister of Health, nor her colleagues in Cabinet acknowledge that:

1. physicians (regulated by the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons) abuse persons with this

disability in provincial facilities, as do other health care-givers regulated under other provincially legislated bodies.

2. since it was chartered 25 years ago, the Human Ecology Foundation, the principal consumer organization for persons disabled by sensitivities, has been expressing concern about physical and emotional abuse, by care-givers, of persons with this disability.

3. in 1984 the Human Ecology Foundation told the Thomson commission that physical and emotional abuse by physicians and other care givers was contributing to increased disability, financial damages, ruined careers, broken families, and other personal tragedies, including deaths and suicides.

4. In their 1985 report to Ontario Liberal Health Minister Murray Elston, George Thomson and his panel of five doctors wrote that the statement "all the identified patients are emotionally ill" was "clearly untenable" in connection with environmental sensitivities.

(This was the Ministry of Health's position at the time.)

5. despite this finding, in statements at the time and since, Mr. Thomson, (Director of Education, Osgoode Hall; then head of the Social Assistance Review Committee; then Ontario Deputy Minister of Labour; and now Ontario's Deputy Attorney General) said that the position of the Ministry of Health, even in the late

eighties, as expressed to him personally by Deputy Minister Dr. Barkin, was that environmental sensitivities were not resulting from real physical illness and that the identified patient might be emotionally ill.

6. The five doctors on Thomson's committee recommended serial dilution titration testing as one reasonably reliable method of testing for some types of sensitivities. The Ministry of Health took no action.

7. all of Thomson's recommendations concerning Ministries other than the Ministry of Health have been implemented, while none of his recommendations that would bring an end to abuse by the Ministry of Health, by the medical community, or by other health care-givers, have been implemented.

8. another recommendation by Thomson and his panel of doctors in 1985 was that provincial and local public health officials disseminate supportive information on sensitivities.

9. Statistics are lacking, but in my personal experience during the 1980's there was about one suicide per year of persons with this disability who had been abused by physicians.

10. in 1989, four years after Thomson's report, a person with sensitivities in Ontario committed suicide

by a gunshot wound to the head in his room in the family home. Public Health officials had advised the family he did not really have sensitivities but was instead suffering from an emotional illness, deeming the man's need for reasonable accommodation imaginary, making it extremely difficult to avoid traumatic episodes of disability

11. Instead of promoting awareness of sensitivities, as recommended by Thomson and the doctors, public health officials here and there in the province give unsubstantiated damaging advice. It was a major reason why the family got on the man's case about his "attitude" towards "pollution".

12. with his family turned against him by public health officials, the man applied to the Ministry of Community and Social Services for disability benefits. He was turned down by a regional office of the Ministry of Community and Social Services because his problem was "thought to be psychological". The ministry physician advisor never examined the man; it was an armchair diagnosis (on the basis of Dr. Donna Stewart's widely discredited article in a 1985 Canadian Medical Association Journal Dr. Stewart's work is irresponsible not because it presents a different point of view. It is irresponsible (and dangerous) because it sustains an either-or argument about a non-existent all-encompassing specific disease entity, and because it ridicules integrity.

13. the Offices of the Ministers of Health, Citizenship, and Community and Social Services were informed of these developments as they were happening. Ministerial staff had recently been informed of previous suicides involving parallel circumstances, including suicides reported to Thomson in 1984.

14. someone who had been on the man's back attempted suicide a few weeks later, remorseful for having been on his case (at the advice of public health officials). Against existing recommendations, against the human rights of the individual affected, against traditions basic in law, professionals, some of them public officials have contributed to several suicides. The actual suicides, of course, are just the tip of an iceberg - a massive of personal, financial, and social consequences from ongoing physical and emotional abuse.

15. a few weeks before the 1989 suicide, Ontario Chief Coroner Ross Bennett had refused requests by another suicide's fiancée and by advocates to investigate a string of suicides and attempted suicides which had occurred in parallel circumstances. He had responded with "I know it's not going to sound very nice, but we just have to wait for a better example".

16. after the suicide Chief Coroner Bennett wrote three Deputy Ministers indicating that the reasons for the suicide were obviously very complex but that

frustrations concerning abuse about his environmental sensitivities "contributed to his ultimate demise".

17. In this case and others abuse by physicians was a major contributing factor, however the Chief Coroner would not agree to approach any medical association, nor would he undertake to carry out any other action to dissuade physicians from physically and emotionally abusing persons with this disability. The Solicitor General has been informed of the coroner's inaction.

18. When asked in 1993 about recommendations concerning abuse by physicians the new Chief Coroner (James Young) resonated, "We'll just have to wait for a better example".

19. After repeated requests from consumers, rulings overturned by the Social Assistance Review Boards, prodding not only from the Chief Coroner but also ongoing approaches from other parties, including the Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, MPPs, consumers, and some professionals, and after the publication, several months later, of articles about government ignoring the coroner's inquiries, by Christie Maclaren of the Globe and Mail, the Ministry of Community and Social Services finally revised their income maintenance policies to reduce the likelihood of abuse of persons with sensitivities.

20. more recently, the Ministry of Community and Social Services decided that special needs assessments be re-directed away from members of members of a specialty of medicine regrettably known for emotionally abusing persons with sensitivities and for questionable actions obstructing the prevention of abuse of children with this disability.

21. the Ministry of Housing made changes to reduce abuse by staff, the Ministry of Community and Social Services made similar changes, however the Ministry of Health, approached at the same time by the Chief Coroner and others, has still done nothing to address attitude problems in staff, or to stop ongoing abuse in its facilities and in Ontario's health care community

22. in 1987, two years before this suicide, a bibliography published by Health and Welfare listed supportive references on sensitivities dating back to 1908. The Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ontario Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Housing, and other provincial Ministries were made abundantly aware of this bibliography a year before the suicide in connection with the string of suicides with parallel circumstances.

23. also in 1987, legally recorded telephone calls - in which a medical doctor confirmed a suicide (of someone who had been subjected to physical and emotional abuse in a hospital) and an attempted suicide (of a woman who

stabbed herself several times and lived) and tape from another doctor's office (confirming suicides in similar circumstances) - were provided to the Office for Disability Issues to raise with the Ministry of Health. (The ODI never raised the issue. The head of the O.D.I. stated, bluntly, "The Ministry of Health knows what it's doing."

24. At least as far back as 1880 some central nervous system problems were related to sensitivities, by Charles Beard according to bibliographies of the Ashford and Miller report (1989 - New Jersey State Department of Health) which won a Macedo Award from the World Health Association

25. Ashford and Miller, in the last six pages of their now five-year-old report, express yet another urgent argument that sensitivities be ruled out before treatment regimes potentially disabling to persons with sensitivities are embarked on.

26. former federal Health Minister Perrin Beatty twice wrote Charles Caccia, saying that "departmental officials fully support" Ashford-Miller's recommendation to rule out sensitivities before embarking on potentially detrimental treatments.

27. The Ontario Ministry of Health was been informed, through both official and unofficial channels, of several federal initiatives to encourage screening high

risk groups, including psychiatric patients. No effort was made to ensure that relevant patients were screened out of high risk groups.

28. in 1989, David Giuffrida, while chief legal counsel with the Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office of the Ontario Ministry of Health, wrote to what was then the Psychiatric Hospitals Branch of the Ministry of Health pointing out that it is important to check persons with central nervous system dysfunction for sensitivities, and that if persons with sensitivity-induced psychiatric symptoms are placed in sick buildings it could increase their disability.

29. In 1989, Ontario NDP Health Critic David Reville wrote to what was then the Psychiatric Hospitals Branch of the Ministry of Health pointing out that it is important to check persons with central nervous system dysfunction for sensitivities.

30. that the Ministry of Education says that, when relevant, sensitivities should be taken into account during the IPRC process of assessing children with learning and behaviour disabilities, and that in such cases the environment of the child should be manipulated to meet the child's special needs under the Education Act (a move reducing the abuse of children whose central nervous system problems are caused by sensitivities, a move that the Ontario Ministry of Health refuses to parallel, despite encouragement from

diverse authorities and stakeholders, despite findings and recommendations in provincially commissioned studies, despit [etc etc]).

31. at our request Chief Commissioner Frazee wrote to three times to two Ontario Health Ministers offering her assistance in dealing with attitude problems related to this disability, and that her offers of assistance were turned down at a time when consumers were complaining to the Minister of Health about ongoing consequences of horrific abuse.

32. as Chief Commissioner Frazee of the Ontario Human Rights Committee put it, relying on science to legitimize the experience of persons with this disability is to "place the presumption on the wrong side".

33. a considerable body of academic literature discusses the practice of taking a "scientific approach" while humans are being horribly abused, much of it having to do with events in Germany during this century, in the southern United States during the past two centuries, and in Canada over five centuries.

34. the Ministry of Health has received several studies during the seventies recommending screening of psych patients (according to former staff and ministerial ink-stamps on copies of studies supplied to us).

35. Michael Dixon, Registrar of the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons has yet to help address attitudes in the medical profession, despite requests dating back several years, because he is not sure the reactions stem from one specific disease entity (which they don't).

36. Dr. Tom Dixon of the Ontario Medical Association has been asked and has refused to work with us to reduce abuse by their members.

37. several authorities have pointed out that environmental sensitivities are not an illness, but are (sometimes disabling) symptoms produced by a number of illnesses.

38. that environmental sensitivity has been on the World Health Organization's list of disabling illnesses for years.

39. that NASA has had (for years) a rather thick manual about sensitivities and about how astronauts are affected by sealed environments.

It is taxing, but more, tragic, when a 17-BILLION dollar organization acts as if unaware of materials and information received through regular subscriptions, commissioned studies, invited input from consumers and professionals and other sources.

According to a recent letter from Canada's Health Minister to the Member Chairing the Parliamentary Association for Sustainable Development, you and your Ministry are constitutionally responsible for consumers abused in health care facilities. There has as yet been no process involving legitimate representation of consumer groups, despite promises leading to the first provincially chartered Ontario organization, in 1969 and over the years since.

Ministry of Health officials have lied and denied as often as the Bosnian Serbs. God knows how many people have died as a result.

...that's all true and in the public interest.

Chris Brown

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